

Dear Education Leaders and Supporters,

We, The Memphis Lift Parent Institute, a member of a national parent network called Powerful Parent Movement, represents parents and grandparents of K-12 students who are enrolled in public schools in disenfranchised communities throughout our country. Since the quarantine shifted the responsibility solely back on parents to serve as their child's educator, we are now faced with the reality that "Public Education" has changed and been redefined. Learning for children, since the COVID-19 pandemic, has returned back to historical roots: at home. The modern challenge with this paradigm shift is that we acknowledge we are not certified teachers, but parents. Our homes are our private domiciles and not public institutions. Nevertheless, our beloved children are now our students. This new educational reality has forced us to reflect on the future of schooling for our children. We surveyed our network parents on their concerns about the educational crisis our children/students have experienced. The loss of seat time and direct instruction has negatively impacted their academic, emotional, and social development.

We, The Memphis Lift Parent Institute, are reminded of a quote by Horace Mann, commonly known as the father of American Public Education, "Let us not be content to wait and see what will happen, but give us the determination to make the right things happen." Though we are uncertain about how Shelby County Public Schools plans to educate our children/students this upcoming school year, we are determined not to wait and see what will happen. We are appealing to you to work with us today on creating a formidable plan for tomorrow. We have the common goal to assure a quality education for our children/students.

We, The Memphis Lift Parent Institute, understand and value our roles as parents and now as educators. We have the power to shift the conversation about the needs of our children, families, and communities that rely on the future of our cities' most precious asset. We know that in the absence of a clear student-first agenda and organized parent-led advocacy, education leaders and policymakers will place their focus on what is in the best interest of the "Political" public education bureaucratic system and not the students, parents, and citizens of Shelby County.

We know that more resources are needed, staffing has to increase, and raises are needed. We know that restructuring has to take place to provide needed services for students, but together we can change this narrative. We change it by uniting together to bring awareness to our needs and close the achievement gaps.

On the other hand, we as the parents can play a very powerful role in shifting this conversation to our children and our families and what WE need. We do not want to send our children back to school as we know it with minimal changes. We insist on being a part of the conversation because these changes will directly affect our children. We would like to serve as partners in the decisions being made when it comes to what schools need and how our children are being educated. Our schools serve families. So, let's talk about what families need. Here are the requirements we request to see for our children's success:

- Our children/students have lost so much learning these last few months. Many of our schools were underperforming and lots of our children/students were far behind where they needed to be before this crisis even happened. We see an opportunity for each child/student to

receive an Individualized Learning Plan for academic recovery by November 1. Plans must come from an assessment of student learning that is given after the start of the 2020-21 school year and must include input from families and the exact steps the schools will take to improve academic success.

- Close the digital divide before schools re-open. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - Every student needs a device loaded with the district's learning program.
  - Every student needs access to free, universal broadband service.
  - Parental training on devices and district learning programs will be needed.
  - Providing City/County-wide free, universal broadband service.
  - City, County, and State Elected Officials demand that the FCC provide no-cost internet access to all families.
- Black and brown people are being impacted by COVID 19 at disproportionately high rates. Parents who are not comfortable with sending their children into school buildings must be given the choice to continue with a district-provided at-home learning program for part or all of 2020-21, without being asked to provide any justification.
- Remote learning must be REAL learning with educators assigned to it full-time who have the proper technical skills and training. If a district is not able to provide good remote instructional programs, don't make our families suffer. We must be given the option of choosing a program in another district, with our funding following our children.
- Schools must get rid of all school fees and supply lists. Supplies should be provided by districts or their community partners, cleaned, and distributed to students. Black and brown people don't have money for supplies right now and it's not even clear whether children/students will be going back to school.
- Districts should collaborate with local and state elected officials in order to create a plan to eliminate the requirements for parents to appear in-person at school to sign forms. Parent-teacher conferences must be offered online for parents who cannot attend in-person. Schools need to anticipate that there are parents with underlying medical issues who are not going to be at school, period.